

VZCZCXRO1604
RR RUEHDE RUEHDIR
DE RUEHDO #0853 3440703
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 090703Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8510
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS DOHA 000853

SIPDIS
FOR NEA/PI

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [ECON](#) [QA](#)

SUBJECT: QATAR ASSESSMENT OF MEPI WOMEN'S SMALL BUSINESS INITIATIVE

REF: STATE 115408

KEY POINTS

-- Qatari women are increasingly establishing and operating their own businesses, raising their share of private business in the country to an estimated 13.4 per cent.

-- The GOQ does not provide any assistance or support that is tailored specifically for women, so the programming options described in reftel could be promoted to a significant constituency.

-- Established last year, the Qatari Businesswomen's Forum would be a logical venue to approach the idea of implementing the Small Business Initiative for Women. In post's view, "How to Start a Business" would be the most advantageous program.

End Key Points.

¶1. Qatari women own and operate 346 firms with a total capital of USD 6 billion, according to a recent study by the Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The study shows that women represent 13.4 per cent of business owners in the country. Recent conversations with several local businesswomen indicated that women are playing an increasingly important role in Qatar's business sector. For example:

-- Aisha Al Mutaz, a Qatari woman who owns a candy and flower shop, told Emboffs that Qatari women are increasingly engaged in business and expanding their activities to new areas. Al Mutaz said women in Qatar who used to confine their investments to beauty centers and cosmetics have recently expanded to real estate, the food industry, education, and other sectors.

-- Natra Al-Abdulla, a Qatari businesswoman with investments in real estate, said there is no governmental support that specifically targets women. However, she added that Sheikha Mozah, consort of the Amir, strongly encourages and supports the growth of women's business ownership and spares no efforts in solving their problems and facilitating their work. An example of the Sheikha's efforts is the launching of the Qatar Businesswomen's Award, which aims to identify and pay tribute to Qatari women who make significant achievements. Another member of the ruling family, Sheikha Al Anoud bint Khalifa Al Thani, who chairs the Qatari Businesswomen's Forum, also provides support to the members of the Forum.

¶2. The Qatari Businesswomen's Forum was established in December 2007 to provide assistance and advice to its members and other women who are in the process of establishing new businesses. Post believes that the Forum, the only such association in the country, would be the appropriate body to implement the Small Business Initiative and "How to Start a Business" would be the most advantageous program for the current constituency.

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